

Law-Making—*Pass the Bill*

HSIE/SOSE Outcomes

- Describes how rules and laws are made.
- Describes features of the federal political process.

Subject matter focus

Using the *Pass the Bill* interactive, students will learn about the procedural stages involved in considering proposed laws. Students will also be introduced to factors from within and beyond the parliament which can impact on the progress of a bill.

Implications for learning

In this area of study, students have opportunities to:

- Explore the different stages of the federal legislative process.
- Understand the roles of the House of Representatives and the Senate in the passage of a bill.
- Appreciate some of the special roles held by members, senators and parliamentary officials.
- Understand the roles of the media and the public in drawing attention to issues.
- Distinguish between the role of the parliament and the role of the government.
- Appreciate the role of the parliamentary committee process in investigating proposed legislation.

Take home message

The federal parliament follows a formal process for creating laws for Australia.

Pass the Bill outcomes

- Understand that one of the parliament's primary roles is to consider legislation.
- Understand that members of parliament debate bills and vote to determine if they become laws.
- Understand that the first, second and third readings are stages in which a bill is progressively examined and refined.
- Understand that the refinement process may include amendments to a bill.
- Understand that many factors may influence the passage of a bill.
- Understand that members of parliament actively gather information relevant to a bill.

Using the *Pass the Bill* interactive

This interactive involves the user in the federal legislative process. Students choose a bill that will be introduced into the House of Representatives and participate in its passage through the parliament. At all times the user is encouraged to explore the options provided in the game to create the best possible law for Australia.

- Begin by asking students to define the word 'bill'. Accept all responses and then tell students that in parliament, the word 'bill' usually refers to a proposed law.
- Involve students in a discussion about what a law is and why we have laws. *We have laws to solve problems.*
- Brainstorm 10 hypothetical bills. List them on the board. Use the following format:
 - Short title: e.g. The Circus Animals Bill.
 - Long title: e.g. A Bill for an Act to ban animals from circuses.
- Let the students explore the *Pass the Bill* interactive. Allow at least 30 minutes for this activity. Task the students to create a flow-chart which records the progress of the bill.
- During the session debrief, identify common elements in the passage of a bill e.g. first, second and third reading; debating; voting etc. To consolidate this activity show

students a diagram of the passage of a bill using Fact Sheet 36 at <http://www.peo.gov.au/students/fss/fss36.html>

- If time allows, have students play *Pass the Bill* several times, so they achieve a sense of all the possible outcomes for a bill proceeding through the chambers. Have students compare similarities and differences in their experiences.
- Use key questions, class activities and reflection questions to build on key concepts introduced in the interactive.

Key Questions

- Where do you think ministers get their ideas for laws? *From committees, their department, the public, their party and lobby groups.*
- Why do you think the chamber is U-shaped? *So that there are two sides to accommodate government and opposition, who can face each other to debate. The cross-bench can sit in between the government and opposition.*
- Why is it important that the minister publicly explains the reasons for introducing the bill? *So that opposition, independents, minor parties and interested members of the public can hear about the bill and consider whether it is a good idea for a law.*
- List all the news stories which occurred during *Pass the Bill*. How did they affect the progress of the bill?
- How is order kept in the House of Representatives and the Senate? *The Speaker/President keeps order.*
- What does the opposition say when voting on a bill? *They may either say 'aye' or 'no', depending on whether they think the bill is appropriate for Australia.*
- List as many differences as you can between the House of Representatives and the Senate. *They differ in colour, members represent electorates while senators represent states, the government has the majority in the House of Representatives, and the Senate usually provides more scrutiny of bills.*
- Can you identify any people in the Senate who weren't in the House of Representatives? What do these people do?
- Which groups of people spoke to the committee, and what other groups might the committee want to talk to? Why is it important for the committee to speak to all these groups? *The committee learns a lot more about the bill, and the people of Australia get a chance to speak to parliamentarians about a particular issue.*
- How does consideration in detail and Committee of the Whole enrich the legislative process? *Amendments to bills usually make the bill fairer, more acceptable and more practical.*
- Why do some bills go to a division vote, while others don't? *A bill goes to a division vote if the major parties don't agree on the bill.*
- Why is the vote counted? *The vote is publicly counted so that the Australian people, interested parties etc, can find out who was for and against the bill.*
- Why would the senators decide to amend a bill during Committee of the Whole? *They might think the bill still needs improving.*
- Why might the government and opposition teams swap sides? *The opposition may support the amendment, and the government may be against it.*
- What is the purpose of the debate in the House of Representatives, given that the government will always succeed in getting its bills through this chamber? *The public may learn about the bill. The opposition can explain their position, scrutinise the government and propose amendments. The government must publicly explain and justify the bill.*
- Which steps in the passage of a bill are compulsory? Which steps are optional? *The committee process, consideration in detail (House) and Committee of the Whole (Senate) are optional.*

Class Activities

- Have students write a proposal for their own bill. They might like to be the minister for education, health, sport, the environment, defence or a minister of their own choice. Further information about writing a bill can be found at http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/toolkit/tk_template_lm.html
- Have students write and illustrate a news story about a major event in Australia. Then have them report how this event might affect the passage of a bill through parliament.
- As a class, make up the title of a bill. Divide the class into government and opposition and have a five minute debate on the bill.
- Think of the title of a bill and write it on the board. Have each student in the class think of an amendment to that bill which would change the title and improve the bill. (E.g. a bill to ban TV commercials could be changed to a bill to ban commercials for unhealthy food or a bill to limit commercials to 3 per hour)
- Choose an issue that your class would like to explore and run a committee role-play. Find instructions at http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/diy_committee.html
- Have students draw a diagram/chart etc. which shows all the stages of a bill. *Bill is introduced, debated, overall idea is voted on, fine detail is fixed, bill is agreed to.* Ask if students have ever used this refining process in their own life or at school e.g. preparing and writing an assignment/project, making models/artwork etc.
- As a class, discuss any bills currently in the news. Share any details that you can remember e.g. what was the impetus for the bill? Was the bill controversial? Did the bill pass into law or not? For details of past and current legislation see 'Links' below.
- Role-play a parliamentary debate. Divide your class group into government, opposition and a couple of independents. Decide on a suitable idea for a law to debate and choose roles for your students. Allow them time to research and prepare speeches. For detailed instructions go to http://www.peo.gov.au/teachers/diy_law.html
- Take a day to turn your class into an emergency sitting of a *Classroom Parliament*. Tell your students that the parliament has been convened to introduce, debate and decide on the top ten rules (or laws) for Australian classrooms. At the end of the day publish the new Acts of (Classroom) Parliament.
- Consider establishing a class parliament or a school representative council (SRC).
- Follow a committee process to investigate a topic of interest to your class or school. Help students research and prepare a submission. They may want to form a petition, take a survey, take photos etc. to support their point of view. For details of current parliamentary committees go to <http://www.aph.gov.au/committee/index.htm>
- Contact your local member and ask them what debates they have recently participated in.

Reflection

- How might laws help to protect the rights and freedom of the Australians? How might laws hinder the rights and freedom of the Australians?
- Committees have the power to recommend changes but cannot actually change a bill themselves. Do you think committees should have the power to change a bill? Why or why not?
- Are there any faults or problems in the way we make laws? How would you improve the process?
- Sometimes the government has a majority in the Senate and other times it does not. What effect would this have when bills are voted on in the Senate? *If the government does not have the majority, it could be out-voted if minor parties and the opposition vote together to defeat a bill.*
- Should the Governor-General have a greater role in the passage of a bill? Is the Governor-General relevant to the process?

Integration

- Maths (numbers in chambers, voting)
- Drama (role-playing, delivering speeches)

Resources

- *Peeling back Parliament*, magazine available from the Parliamentary Education Office. See <http://www.peo.gov.au/publications/pbp.html>
- Parliament of Australia, Publications:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/pubs/index.htm> and
<http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/pubs/index.htm>

Links

- Video - Making a Law:
<http://www.peo.gov.au/multimedia/video/makingALaw/transcript.html>
- Parliament of Australia: <http://www.aph.gov.au>
- Australian Electoral Commission: <http://www.aec.gov.au/>
- Parliament of Australia, Bills: <http://www.aph.gov.au/bills/index.htm>
- Parliament of Australia, Who's who:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/whoswho/index.htm>
- Scaleplus, law resource: <http://scaleplus.law.gov.au>
- House of Representatives infosheets:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/info/infosheets/index.htm>
- Senate briefs information sheets:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/pubs/briefs/index.htm>